

DEATH INVESTIGATION

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CALEA 6th Edition Standard:

360 DEATH INVESTIGATION

360.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The investigation of cases involving a death includes those ranging from natural causes to homicide. Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appear to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations to include evidence gathering and witness identification is paramount.

360.2 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Death investigation cases require certain actions be taken. Emergency Medical Services shall be called in all suspected death cases, unless the death is obvious (e.g., the person has been decapitated or the body is decomposed). Officers are not authorized to pronounce death. A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations.

360.2.1 MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST

The office of the Medical Examiner shall be called and provided with known facts concerning the time, place, manner and circumstances of the death involving any of the following circumstances (§ 58-720.1, RSMo; § 58-720.2, RSMo):

1. Violence by homicide, suicide or accident
2. From thermal, chemical, electrical or radiation injury
3. From criminal abortion, including any situation where such abortion may have been self-induced
4. From a disease which may be hazardous, contagious, may constitute a threat to the health of the general public or when a person dies
5. When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was in good health
6. Where no physician, chiropractor or accredited Christian Science practitioner is in attendance within the 36-hour period immediately preceding death
7. While in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated in a public institution
8. From external violence, unexplained cause or under suspicious circumstances
9. When a death occurs outside a licensed health care facility and a member of this department is the first official to learn of the death

360.2.2 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

The Medical Examiner or designated assistant and authorized investigators are generally the only persons that should move, handle or search a body. The Medical Examiner's office, may take property, objects or articles found on the deceased or in the deceased's immediate vicinity that may be necessary for conducting an investigation to determine the identity of the deceased or the cause or manner of death.

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Should exigent circumstances indicate to an officer that any other search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Medical Examiner's designated assistant, the investigating officer should first obtain verbal consent from the Medical Examiner office when practicable.

An officer may make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for the purpose of identification or for information identifying the individual as a donor. If a donor document is located, the Medical Examiner's office shall be promptly notified.

Whenever reasonably possible, a witness, preferably a relative of the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain nearby the scene and available to the officer pending the arrival of the Medical Examiner's office. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.

Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Medical Examiner's office, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the report.

360.2.3 DEATH NOTIFICATION

When reasonably practicable, and if not handled by the Medical Examiner's office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the officer assigned to the incident. If the next-of-kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction shall be requested to make the personal notification. If the relatives live outside this county, the Medical Examiner may be requested to make the notification. The Medical Examiner's office needs to know if notification has been made. Assigned officers/deputies may need to talk to the next-of-kin.

If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this department shall attempt to locate family members and inform them of the death and location of the deceased missing person's remains. All efforts to locate and notify family members shall be recorded in appropriate reports and properly retained.

360.2.5 UNIDENTIFIED BODIES DATA ENTRY

As soon as reasonably possible, but no later than 30 working days after the date a death is reported to the Department, all available identifying features of the unidentified body including dental records, fingerprints, any unusual physical characteristics and a description of clothing or personal belongings found on or with the body should be forwarded to Public Safety Joint Communications for entry into the Missouri state database and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) file.

360.2.6 DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING

All incidents involving a death shall be documented on the appropriate form.

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360.2.7 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the officer shall take steps to protect the scene. The Criminal Investigation Supervisor shall be notified to determine the possible need for an investigator to respond to the scene for further immediate investigation.

If the on-scene supervisor, through consultation with the Watch Commander or Criminal Investigation supervisor, is unable to determine the manner of death, the investigation shall proceed as though it is a homicide.

360.2.8 EMPLOYMENT-RELATED DEATHS OR INJURIES

The primary investigator who responds to and determines that a death has occurred as a result of an accident at or in connection with the victim's employment, should ensure that the regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office is notified by telephone or teletype with all pertinent information.